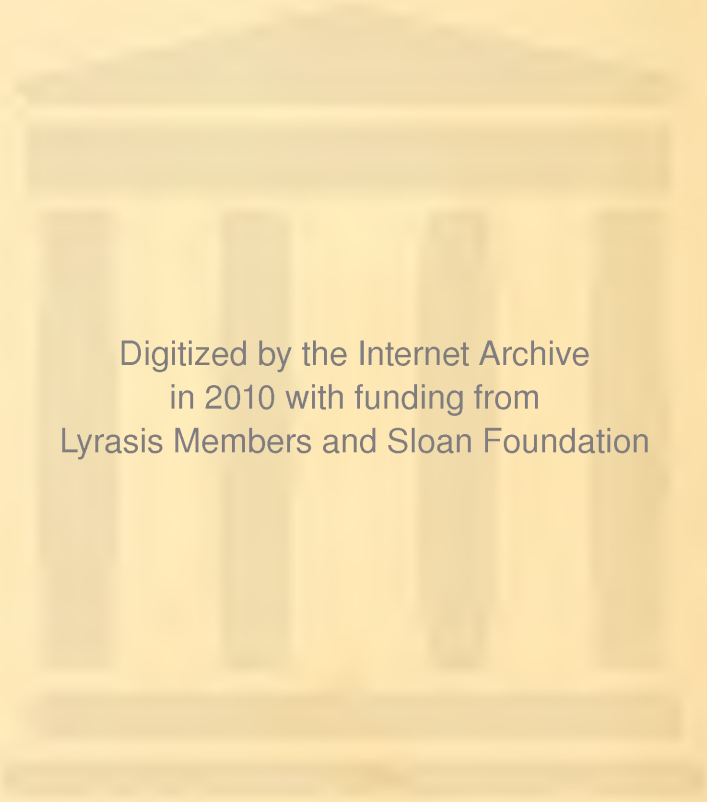

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11.

TO

MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL,

AND

OFFICERS OF CHURCHES,

In South Carolina.

Dear Brethren,

THE state of the churches in this section of our country is such as to call loudly on every follower of Christ to be diligent in the promotion of vital godliness. Suffer the word of faithful exhortation, therefore, with that kindness which will be hereafter a source of pleasing reflection on a dying bed and in the day of retribution. I make no apology for summoning up all the energies I possess, to rouse you, if I may, to the duties of this accepted time, and day of salvation. I will not believe that the peculiar vows and obligations you have voluntarily assumed can be so trifling in your estimation that they will not afford strong motives for a candid and prayerful consideration of the few following remarks.

Let me begin by solemnly asking you in the presence of God, what is the state of religion in your own souls? Are you left to minister formally and coldly at the altar from week to week without a burning and increasing zeal for your own edification, the glory of God, and the salvation of souls. Are you secular in your pursuits, worldly in your feelings, more pushing and strenuous in the common business of life than in serving the church, undistinguished from the

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most greedy worldlings in your congregations except by the externals of your vocation? Are you preaching as a trade and for a livelihood; and when you are paid your stipend, do you sit down contented, though the church be stationary, though no inquirers ask *what they shall* do to be saved, no growing purity and devotion appear among the professors of religion to whom you preach?

If there be one minister whose conscience answers in the affirmative to these questions thus asked in the presence of God, let me sound the trumpet of alarm and terror to his heart. Awake, most guilty and inexcusable of all offenders against the Saviour you profess to preach and honor! If the apostles felt it needful to strive diligently, to mortify and bring under every fleshly and worldly disposition, lest after having preached to others they themselves should be cast away, where, carnal and worldly ministers and rulers of the church, where will you appear, condemned for your own aggravated sins, and sunk to tenfold vengeance by the accumulated guilt of others which you partake and encourage and increase!

If in your hearts there be one spark of Christian feeling for the honor of your Redeemer and the precious souls whose salvation it is your most solemn duty to seek, stir up yourselves to examine the doctrine preached in your churches, and try it by the word of God and the effects it produces. If it be not found to exalt God our Saviour, to stain the pride of man, to humble and purify those who profess to receive it, and whom you receive into your churches, then you must be shamefully ignorant of the truth, or grossly negligent in declaring it, or careless to a most culpable degree, in the admission of members. Do you or your churches believe religion to be a hereditary thing, which so necessarily belongs to the catechised or baptized offspring of professors, that if their outward conduct be correct, when they come to years of maturity, they may of course be admitted to full communion? What have been the effects of such notions and practices, but the prostitution of sacred ordinances, the contempt of religion, and the extension of a formal and stupid and heartless system, so that whole churches may be found, of whom almost every individual may be said to have a name to live while he is truly dead in tres-

passes and sins. I charge you before God, to testify to your people that a profession of religion is very different from the possession of it. Bring it home in the plainest manner to their hearts and consciences, that there is reason to believe multitudes of the members of our churches are not christians, and will hear Christ, at the final day, declare in terror to their deluded souls, "I never knew you." You will have to answer for every instance of careless and improper admission to your churches at which you have connived, and for the lamentable errors into which the rulers of the church have fallen, in many instances, as to what constitutes a credible profession of piety. You ought to know and feel and teach, that nothing short of genuine faith in Christ, a faith which renounces every other ground of justification, and depends solely on his righteousness for salvation, with a total renunciation of sin and sincere repentance for it, can qualify a man for admission to the church. But it is a fact to be lamented with tears of bitter humiliation, that multitudes have been admitted, and are still admitted, who have not these qualifications, who are even profoundly ignorant of religion, and have no claim to church privileges, but that they live a correct moral life.

And now, to advance a step farther, what is the actual condition of your churches? The flocks of some pastors in this region exhibit some pleasing appearances. They embrace a number of praying souls, walking humbly in the ways of Christ, and adorning their profession in the eyes of the world. The minister in some cases is devoted to his work, faithful to the souls of his people, heavenly minded and devout in private, and by his whole conduct recommends the truth he preaches, while he carefully examines those who present themselves for communion, and takes pains, with the aid of his church officers, to maintain true christian discipline. God's blessing has descended to crown his labours, and we desire to give thanks for the additions made in this way of such as shall be saved. But alas! the painful reverse of all this is the picture of a large majority of our churches. The greatest carelessness in instruction, the grossest indifference to the conversion of sinners and the edification of Christians, the utmost prayerlessness and worldliness are sometimes found to characterize him who ministers at the altar. And even where this is not

the case, when the pastor has some zeal and fidelity, and takes some pains, he feels so restricted in his circumstances that he must devote most of his time to making a livelihood. Thus sinking into a mere farmer, he ceases to be regarded as a spiritual guide. Never consulted for spiritual purposes, he learns to forget that, wherever he meets one of his people, he is bound, as he shall answer it at the judgment seat of Christ, to make some effort for that individual's eternal good. His conversation is altogether filled with news, bargains, the state of crops, the markets, and other matters entirely of a worldly nature.

Add to this, that in many churches there are large bodies of formalists who never knew any thing of vital religion. They joined the church, as was observed before, with no other claim than their correct outward conduct, and expect others to join it now, on the same ground. They feel nothing for the souls of others, they live prayerless worldly lives, and consider religion as a mere profession attended with the observance of certain rites and ceremonies. The minister in many cases, has never disturbed their false peace, and the whole church becomes, every year, more and more firmly settled in one of the most dreadful delusions that ever preyed on its vitals.

Count up the number of hopeful members added to your churches since your residence with them, and tell us if they are not lamentably few; and how does the devotion and zeal of your people compare with the standard of the gospel? What efforts are your people making to increase religion among themselves, and to extend it elsewhere? Do not many of your members grudge you your hard earned salaries? Do not many of them evade all arguments in favor of the evangelizing of the heathen, the increase of ministers, and the circulation of the Scriptures.

And what will be the consequence of this downward course? What are the prospects of our Southern churches, unless times of refreshing come from the presence of the Lord? Many, once as flourishing as any of yours, are gone to decay, and others are sinking lower every year. The ruins of the house of God are now to be seen, where once crowds attended his solemn ordinances. Vacant places are numerous, and they

will without doubt become more numerous, if the present state of things be not reformed. Instead of sending the gospel to the destitute elsewhere, we shall soon be destitute ourselves, and depend on the charity of others to evangelize us again.

The true cause of all these evils is the want of energy and zeal in our clergy and church officers, and of vital piety in our professors of religion. Let us candidly look around us and see whether these things be not so. True there are many difficulties in the way, but a reformation must be attempted, IT MUST BE ACCOMPLISHED.

This view of our churches is drawn by one of yourselves.—Born and bred among you, I have long looked with pain on the state of things, but before I leave this dissolving tabernacle, I must speak once and faithfully to every minister of Christ in this important region.

You must know, if you are not wilfully ignorant, that the state of other churches is very different from that of ours.—You know, (and oh, that the knowledge affected your hearts as it should do!) that in many churches once cold and formal, God has poured out a copious blessing in answer to the prayers of a few faithful souls, and given a rich increase to the labours of their pastors. This blessing has hardly ever been afforded except where the minister's zeal and engagedness were conspicuous, constant, and supported by an ardent love to Christ and to the souls of men. And is there one of us who reads an account of hundreds of souls brought home to God within a short period, and feels no stirrings within him of the flame of piety, love, and zeal, offers no ardent petition that himself too may see the pleasure of the Lord thus prospering in his hand, nor rouses up all his energies to awake secure sinners and slumbering professors of religion? Impossible, impossible! No! the truth is, we read, we feel, we pray, we start up and engage with some increase of zeal for the moment; but we are called off to our worldly business, we soon lose these impressions, we *do not give our whole souls and bodies to the business, we act without system*, we neglect to summon around us the few praying souls we know, to engage in the unceasing fervent prayer which takes the kingdom of heaven by violence, and never will be denied the blessing it craves.

My brethren in the ministry, time is hurrying us on to judgment, and there we shall meet souls who lived within the bounds of our ministrations, who never heard one faithful warning addressed to them personally; many who were never made to understand the method of salvation; many who were suffered to believe, till they died, they they were Christians, while in fact they were far from God and from righteousness. Did we not, when we consecrated ourselves to the ministry, profess to give our whole powers to the cause? And do we now draw back? Do we now think the object of our profession, the salvation of souls, unworthy of our highest regard? Are we now unwilling to spend, and be spent in it? If so, let us give up the employment—There are ways of making an *honest* livelihood. If we live of the altar, we are bound to serve the altar. And is the scanty salary we receive worth our souls, our peace of conscience, our eternal happiness? Are there not employments enough, by which we can easily earn more of the mammon of unrighteousness?

Perhaps some slothful servant of Christ will say, "I have been preaching regularly, what I think the truth, I have an orderly quiet congregation, they are well pleased with me, and they live as well as most other people. It is true there are not many additions, and those do not consist of peculiarly warm hearted or zealous people, there are none anxious about their salvation, they do not give much for benevolent purposes, and they are rather niggardly in my support, but I hope we are doing well, we have no divisions, and no need for severe discipline, and no other sect makes any inroads upon us." What a contrast to the state of a church, whose pastor within a few years has seen the addition of six hundred members without noise or tumult, most of them prayerful, zealous, and liberal in the support and spread of the gospel, who scarcely ever passes a day without preaching or lecturing to some part of his congregation and being consulted by such as are inquiring what they shall do to be saved, who has several Bible classes for his young people meeting weekly and attended with signal effects in improving their knowledge and piety, and whose labours in the study and the pulpit, are accompanied with regular pastoral visiting from house to house, to pray and

converse with families and individuals. Compare the two, and if you are beginning to say, my scanty support will not permit me to do thus, remember God knows your difficulties, but he knows also, what you can do, You CAN BE IN EARNEST, you CAN speak as if you felt the value of souls, you CAN admonish those whom you occasionally see, or have time to visit, you CAN substitute the converse of a minister for the barren worldly talk of a mere farmer, you CAN set Christians, if there be but two or three of them, on praying in earnest for the REVIVAL OF PURE AND UNDEFILED RELIGION, you CAN pray without ceasing for the blessing of God on your ministry, you CAN circulate books and tracts and magazines of an awakening spirit among your people, you CAN draw the line boldly and impartially between the nominal and real Christian, and tell the former plainly *he must be born again, or never see the kingdom of God.* You CAN begin the work in your own closet, beseeching forgiveness for the past, and praying for grace for the future—You CAN, with fasting and humiliation, make known to your people your deep conviction of the need of a great and thorough reformation—"proclaim a fast, call a solemn assembly, summon the elders," charge your whole church to join in the same unfeigned repentance, and "to seek the Lord, if peradventure he will repent and return and leave a blessing behind him."

My brethren, you not only CAN, but you MUST do all this. You MUST rouse every power and faculty to the work of a great reformation. You MUST NOT do the work of the Lord deceitfully. We MUST experience a season of deep and general humiliation before God, and begin a course of devoted, untiring, humble, faithful, prayerful labour for souls. We MUST not give up this course while we live, or we MUST renounce all hope of a revival of religion in the State—we MUTT give up our churches to desolation, and our congregations to eternal ruin. We MUST disgrace the office we hold, we MUST deny Christ himself before men, and be at length denied the crown prepared for faithful ministers in Heaven.

Let our Conferences, Presbyteries, and Associations, act *as bodies*, in this momentous matter, let them come forward uni-

tedly and proclaim the necessity of faithfulness and earnest prayer both in ministers and people, and concert plans suited to awaken and engage the churches in seeking, with one heart and voice, the revival of vital godliness. I would humbly suggest the propriety of making every Wednesday a day of peculiar devotion, social and secret, with regard to this great subject.

May God bless this effort to awaken my brethren in the ministry,—may he give us a spirit of grace and supplication and gloriously revive his work among us, for Christ's sake !—AMEN.

N. B. Ministers and others are requested to give this as extensive circulation among those to whom it is directed as possible.

WM. RILEY, PRINTER, 125 CHURCH-STREET, CHARLESTON, SO. CA.